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February 2006

# Continuous teacher professional development in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

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## Recommended Citation

Joldoshalieva, R. (2006). Continuous teacher professional development in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. *Quality in education: Teaching and leadership in challenging times*, 2, 788-806.

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# Continuous Teacher Professional Development in Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

*Rahat Joldoshalieva, AKU-IED, Pakistan*

Учитель остается учителем до тех пор пока учится. Как только он  
перестает учиться в нем умирает учитель!

К. Д. Ушинский

A teacher is the one as long as he or she keeps learning. As soon as he or she  
stops learning, the teacher in him or her dies.

Ushinski, K. D.

## Background: In-Service Teacher Education in Soviet and Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan

Continuous teacher professional development was an important aspect of Soviet education. Termed as *perepodgotovka* [retraining] *i povysheenie kvalifikatsii* [qualification raising], in-service teacher education programs in Soviet Kyrgyz Republic were systematically implemented through the state-funded Kyrgyz Institute of Education and other *oblast* [province] teacher retraining institutes. In-service training courses both on-site and off-site were of different durations. The courses varied from full time to part time, from ongoing, problem-based and goal-oriented, to the thematic. Apart from this, different seminars, theoretical and practical conferences, research experiments, consultative meetings and competitions (Teacher of the Year, etc) were part of professional development programs. In spite of these, an off-site one-month course was the dominant practice in teacher professional development since the 1960's (Kibardina, 1997). In addition, the teacher professional development was also monitored and supported by city and district education departments under the supervision of Oblast Education Department. According to the policy, after 5 years of service,

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<sup>4</sup> I employ this term to describe all the programs/activities for serving teachers and synonymously using with 'in-service teacher education'. This excludes initial or pre-service teacher education programs.

every teacher was required to attend monthly courses in the Oblast Teacher Retraining Institutes.

During Soviet Union, 50% of the content of off-site courses was devoted to the ideological and political education where Marxist-Leninist ideology and Communist Party achievements were emphasized. This was because school teachers had the mandate to educate the “Soviet citizens”. The other 50% was concentrated on specific subject content and pedagogy development with the introduction to educational innovations (Kibardina, 1997). The pedagogy of these courses was lectures, discussions and problem situations. Kerr (1991) criticizes USSR teacher re-training,

...the opportunities teachers had been in fact quite limited: A few days of few years spent in a state Institute for Teacher Improvement (Institut Usovershenstvovaniia Uchitelei), an Institute for Qualification Raising (Institut povysheniia kvalifikatsii).... The faculty at these institutes were not (in general; there were exceptions) highly regarded by teachers, and the material they learned there often was not seen as very relevant to their daily concerns on the job. (p. 5)

In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, scholars like Babaev, Baltabaev, Bekboev, Timafeev, Palagina and Kibardina studied different teacher re-training program components. However, published in local languages (Russian, Kyrgyz) to many outsider-researchers this area appears as un-researched. Highlighting the issues of in-service teacher education practices in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, Kibardina (1997) stated that teacher professional development continues to be the responsibility of Kyrgyz Institute of Education, Oblast Teacher Retraining Institutes (OTRI), in collaboration with the city and district education departments. To add to her discussion, since independence, as similar activities to OTRI's other institutions have been offering professional development opportunities for teachers. This compares favorably with the limited choices in the Soviet era.

Foremost, the disintegration of USSR has negatively affected professional development opportunities, and this is related to general economic decline. They became irregular and not affordable for teachers, as they were required to share some costs (transport, accommodation, etc) to attend these courses. According to OSI-Education Support Program Report (2002), “Professional support and recognition of teachers decreased as the state failed to fulfill their legal obligations to provide regular in-service training.” (p. 17).

Currently, imbalances and shortage of teachers in many subjects in rural locations are in catastrophic state. Due to difficult living conditions and irregularity in teacher salary distribution, rural schools do not attract fresh university graduates. Various mechanisms to address teacher shortage problem were implemented. Schools hired correspondence course and/or part-time university students, invited retired teachers and recruited fresh school graduates. However, by recruiting unqualified teachers, the quality of teacher performance also deteriorated. This situation emphasized for serious consideration of diversifying in-service teacher education to meet contextual needs within the realities of tight budgets.

Small scale exploratory study was conducted to investigate existing realities of in-service teacher education in the post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, by capturing the voices of serving teachers themselves, of their management and of the teacher educators. To do so, I employed semi-structured interviews. Overall, twenty seven individual semi-structured interviews from school principals and subject teachers of four city schools—two newly-opened private schools and two government schools—and teacher educators of oblast institute for teacher retraining and city education department master trainers in Osh oblast, southern Kyrgyzstan, were obtained. Data was collected between December 2003 and January 2004. In addition, I observed some teacher professional development at schools, sessions at teacher retraining institute and the city teachers' January *dekada*. As the data was collected from the city schools, the findings and discussion excludes the realities of in-service teacher education in the rural schools.

## Findings

### Existing Continuous Teacher Professional Development

Some structures and activities for school teachers' professional development reflected the activities of Soviet in-service teacher education, with the exception of the new opportunities provided by organizations other than the government. Three major approaches, namely the off-site courses, school-based and self-initiated activities for teacher professional development, co-exist and supplement each other in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan schools.

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° It will be discussed later in this paper.

The courses which were conducted outside the schools were defined as *off-site courses*. These included the courses by the government-run Oblast Teacher Retraining Institutes (OTRI).

In addition, the city education department, in collaboration with Kyrgyz Institute of Education, organized annual “January” and “August” conferences, mostly known as *dekada*. The following observation was noted in technical drawing teachers’ subject meeting during a January *dekada*.

The session started with a school teacher presenting her report on didactic methods of teaching this subject. This was followed by a city education department methodologist who informed teachers about upcoming inspection from Ministry of Education from Bishkek and gave a list of required documents to file. He dictated that calendar plans should be complete and neatly done, along with teacher resume (CV) and plan of club activities, monitoring and analysis of children’s learning of subject, classroom decorations, and notebook on self-education and teacher reports. Teachers requested to explain what resume meant. Head of this subject department for city schools shared the structure of the resume. Teachers further shared the concerns over lack of own classrooms for decoration and other resources. The methodologist further ordered teachers to share the classrooms with other subject areas and decorate and find resources for documentation and decoration. He stated, “Your students don’t know very simplistic skills in technical drawing because quality of teaching is not good. (Obs. January, 2004)

Other seminars were offered by international institutions (e.g. Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan). A teacher shared his experience from one of these seminars and courses.

I have attended the course on “Yiman ” in Jalal Abad. This subject is newly introduced to schools. The course was conducted by some Americans and our own educators. It was interesting course as they used many interactive methods. I am now trying to implement those learnings in my teaching. (Primary class teacher, School G)

Geopolitical interests in the region were also reflected in in-service teacher education. Some courses funded by countries with own political interests existed in the system. As for example, Russian Federation funded programs which

offered short term courses for Russian medium school teachers at one of the universities of Kyrgyzstan. For Russia, it was strategic to support the Russian language instruction in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan where Russian was recognized as an official language.

**School-based activities** for teacher development were *metod ob'edinenie*, mentoring beginning teachers, induction seminars for beginning teachers and a few others.

Methodological departments comprised of specific subject teachers, and were headed by an experienced colleague. An English language methodological department head explained this process in the government school:

In our English language methodological department we have divided one theme for each month and assign the said to the teachers. They plan and conduct the seminar to others. We discuss the issues and suggest the ways to improve the teaching of English language at school. Each class units are also divided into 9 parts and we usually discuss those with each other. Apart from this, experienced teachers observe and help beginning teachers. Each methodological department is responsible for *dekada* in their subject areas. There are 9 subject areas for 9 months. (English language teacher, School G)

Hence, teachers were encouraged to share innovative ideas with each other and discuss related issues. Control and monitoring of departments' activities was carried out by vice principal on academics. Inter-school methodological departments organized 'subject *dekadas*' at different times of the year. 'Hosting' school teachers prepared *otkrytie uroki*, extra – curricular activities related to subject area, and then organized a forum for joint discussion on observed lessons and on general issues of teaching. Three schools practiced *nadstavnichetsvo* (mentoring). In this, experienced teachers mentored beginning teachers. Many young teachers reported that mentoring enabled them to learn classroom management skills. A teacher had this to say,

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° It is translated as methodological department and is equivalent to subject department.

ˆ The literal translation of *otkrytie uroki* is 'open lessons', similar to demonstrative lessons which were pre-planned and had specific purpose of showing the best practice.

Each beginning teacher is supposed to work with an experienced one. Mostly mentoring is conducted through encouraging beginning teacher to observe the experienced teacher's lessons. (English language teacher, School G)

Apart from mentoring, newly recruited teachers attended induction seminars organized by the school.

School documentations such as lesson planning and maintaining class register were the aspects with which the young teachers had difficulties. A vice principal of academics explained further:

The fact is that 25% of our teaching staff consists of beginning teachers this year. In the month of December, we are planning to conduct a seminar for newly recruited and beginning teachers titled "Help for young teachers". Experienced teachers will share their experiences with them and demonstrate some good teaching practices. They will also learn how to fill the class register and with other school documents. (Vice principal, School G)

In one of the private schools, seminars for newly recruited teachers were organized systematically with comprehensive syllabus/curriculum development exercises to encourage them to use a learner-centered approach and acquaint themselves to private school system nuances.

It was emphasized,

In our school, we emphasize teacher professional development. So we have created conditions for this. First of all, we have the special position of teacher educator who is responsible for planning and carrying out professional development activities. The person has required qualifications and rich experience of conducting professional development for teachers. She prepares an annual plan for teacher development, which we discuss and add or remove some according to the needs. Secondly, we have arranged one day for professional development that is Saturday. This day is used for seminar or courses or teacher independent development. Thirdly, we have funding for organizing seminars and inviting qualified specialists for this purpose. (Principal, School A)

Equivalent to the in-house teacher educator, in a government school the position of a vice principal of *vospitanie i nauki* [science] was newly introduced. The school was the first city school-gymnasium to have a vice principal of this kind. Another form of professional development was identified as teacher appraisal or known as *attestatsia*. Teachers usually organized compulsory demonstrative lessons for this purpose. In addition, city education department required teachers to maintain a portfolio of self-education which should demonstrate teachers' continuing professional development attempts. This included pedagogical *masterstvo* [craftship], development level of teacher's political knowledge, tolerance and pedagogical tact of the teacher and the cultural level of the teacher. Moreover, each teacher was required to observe other colleagues' lessons and record those in their peer-observation journals. School-based teacher professional development, considered useful in many respects, which allowed the teachers to learn specific aspects in teaching and utilized school-resources such as time and fellow teachers.

Diverse ways for teacher **self-initiated development** were shared. Teachers reported that they looked for outside school opportunities to develop professionally. An anecdote reflected,

During Soviet times, the government was after us, teachers, to attend the courses. Everything was paid by the government  
Nowadays, we are looking for the courses and pay for those ourselves. (Kyrgyz language teacher, School G)

Among many other opportunities, teachers mostly attended seminars organized by the Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan. In addition, different award-bearing or short term programs created a path for teachers to get experience of training outside the country. However, many of these programs were restricted to teachers who mastered the particular foreign languages (predominantly English). Unfortunately many teachers could not avail these chances.

Moreover, teachers consulted colleagues from other schools and/or university faculty to learn more.

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\* Shamatov (2005) explained this term broadly. He stated, " ... 'upbringing' [is] to refer to one of the main aims of education in Soviet and post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. "Upbringing" was a powerful socio-political socialization of the Soviet Education. It overlaps in a conceptual sense with "civics", but it is used to denote a much broader concept of social and ethical upbringing within and outside school."



I consult the teacher in X school who taught me mathematics if I have some problems in some aspects of teaching or the content itself. Even I had some problems regarding the calendar planning so I went to her as she is a very experienced teacher and soon she will retire. I go to her because there is nobody who can help me in my area at our school. I also phone my friend who teaches math in another school. We share our experiences and new methods. We both cannot meet often as I am busy at school till 4 in the afternoon every day. (Math teacher, School I)

Likewise, committed teachers organized workshops for colleagues to share their learning's from courses or from implementing ideas in their classrooms. However, they shared that they got de-motivated when their colleagues show little interest to attend and appreciate their effort.

Teachers' own individual and independent work in enriching or developing their own syllabus also created opportunities for teachers learn more. Teachers brought changes and enriched the syllabus within the school and classroom realities, and to suit to the students' diverse needs and styles of learning. Teachers were encouraged to disseminate their tested curriculum to other teachers by publishing in newspapers:

Nowadays all the teachers in government schools have had chance to develop their own, or 'avtorskyi' curriculum. They also can disseminate to others if they can. For instance, I have developed my own curriculum for primary classes and have given to "Osh janirigi" and I am expecting it to be published soon. I want to note that we can develop ourselves in this way too, but it depends on ourselves as teachers whether we are willing to work hard on those as it requires commitment and will. If work hard, we can achieve many things. (Primary class teacher, School G)

Teachers read literature subscribed by school or themselves; or by accessing the said in libraries to enrich their content and delivery. National educational newspaper of Ministry of Education, *Kut Bilim*, periodically published newly required documents for schools and teachers, and this further increased their knowledge of wider educational context. Hence, as discussed above and what EFA report (2000) reported that despite the hardships, teachers in Kyrgyzstan continue to improve their professional skills independently or gaining experience from each other's practices.

## **Issues of Existing Teacher Professional Development Programs and Structures**

Most of the above mentioned programs and approaches co-existed with each other as part of in-service teacher education. However, mostly they got criticism because of their low quality, difficult accessibility and a lack of supportive structures.

### **Deteriorating Quality**

Teachers are highly concerned of deteriorating quality of teacher professional development in terms content and pedagogy, structure and relevance. Most criticism was directed at the OTRI's programs. Among those were outdated, purely theoretical course content and authoritarian pedagogy, course insensitivity towards teachers' needs and teacher trainers' poor professional expertise.

With the poor quality of teacher training, OTRI was not able to attract private schoolteachers to attend their programs:

The courses in the Oblast Teacher Retraining Institute did not offer much support to my teaching. I just spent one month without any improvement. Although, I got theory in general, I did not learn anything new specifically about my subject area. (Math teacher, School I)

In the past, teacher trainers were expected to have classroom teaching experiences so as to allow them to work with school teachers. With this regard, some OTRI teacher trainers were critical about their colleagues who had no classroom teaching at schools. In addition, an unsatisfactory salary and a lack of supportive structure in the institute did not motivate them to develop professionally. The institute failed to recruit highly qualified professionals because of under funding.

Weighty emphasis on nation building to some extent had resulted in the creation of insecure feelings in other ethnicities like Russians in Kyrgyzstan after its independence. Profound migration figures in the country since its independence included the educators, who occupied most positions at the universities and other institutions. Replaced by non-Russians in their seats, the courses offered were often criticized because of the poor Russian language proficiency of the trainers.

City education department did not restrict private schoolteachers' attendance in annual subject *dekadas* in January and August. However, school management did not view it as something beneficial to attend:

All of our teachers previously worked in government schools and attended these *dekadas* and other gatherings. We know the process well and I did not get any greater extent of benefit from these. Except information dissemination, there is usually nothing there. They could disseminate those information in other ways to tell the truth. In addition, in these subject section or department activities, nothing is resolved or decided or worked. (Vice principal, School I)

Within school-based teacher professional development, mentoring practice was considered beneficial for the mentor and mentee teacher. Within the hardship, the mentoring was not a systematic and regular practice as opposed to Soviet times, and its quality worsened due to several factors. Firstly, teachers' heavy workload did not allow them to spend time in observing lessons and discussing matter with the mentees. Thus, with little support, mentee teachers struggled with school and classroom difficulties on their own. Secondly, due to fewer experienced teachers in the schools, two-year experienced teachers were expected to mentor newly joined teachers, thus both being inexperienced in many respects. Thereby, the practice of mentoring was questioned with regards to its quality and authenticity.

School-based courses of a private school with heavy content were questioned with regards to their impact on teachers' classroom teaching. Provision of immediate support within classroom application process was overlooked due to ambitious attempts to change the teachers' conceptions. Moreover, generic nature of seminars on methods of teaching did not allow teachers to be helped in how to implement in specific subject areas.

In the discussion on quality professional literature, teachers' concerns were associated with the inappropriateness of the literature to their specific needs and contextual realities. Teachers realized that the value of their own experience should be extended and they should take responsibility to disseminate that knowledge to other teachers. Unfortunately, directly or indirectly, the worsening quality of programs or activities reflected the overall economic crisis of the country and shrinking state funding on public education.

## Access as an Issue

Deteriorating situation of teacher professional development in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan was also associated with a lack of access to professional literature and quality teacher professional development programs. To sustain and raise the quality of courses at OTRI, teacher trainers required access to quality professional literature and supportive information technology. They explained the problem of outdated content through the institute's inability to find the financial means to supply up-to-date literature and equipment, and this made trainers continue their work using available resources that they had inherited from the Soviet era, which unfortunately could not satisfy modern requirements.

Teachers of core curricular subject areas (mathematics, languages, and history) had wider options in terms of participation in courses, which eventually generated disappointment among considerably less important subject teachers such as physical education, labor, music and drawing.

With the emergence of the private sector in an ex-public sector dominating society, the collaboration between the government and private institutions required considerate attention. Lack of structures for collaboration seemed to create the major issues and tensions. Private school teachers observed unfair treatment when special trainings was conducted for government schoolteachers, (as an example of ADB sponsored courses) and which excluded them from the opportunities and demanded from them payment for participation in those programs. With tight budgets, the needs of government institutions, which served wider population, became a priority for the state.

Teachers highlighted that access to professional literature was the major challenge. Given the low-paid profession, teachers cannot afford the lavishness of subscribing to professional literature as compared to Soviet times. In addition, prices for literature and periodicals went high with the emergence of the free market. The government schools subscribed to number of professional newspapers from students' fees for gymnasium classes or by sometimes deducting it from the teachers' 'already small' salary. Many teachers complained of being forced to subscribe to newspapers when their salary could not afford to feed their families.

Sometimes Soros Foundation gives us some literature, but they are so few. For instance, last year we got one edition of journal "Forum" and a single copy. We used to subscribe to the "Foreign languages at schools" journal during Soviet Union, something

which almost every foreign language teacher could do. But now each edition is 200-300 Kyrgyz *soms* [approx. US\$5 – 6], we cannot afford that. (English language teacher and Vice principal, School K).

Few other issues, along with the mostly low quality literature, did not help in resolving their need to learn new content and pedagogy. Some teachers even were of the opinion that Kyrgyzstan was isolated from information, especially in the Russian language. Moreover, teachers of newly introduced subjects into curriculum echoed that they did not get subject area methodological literature. For instance, gaining the official language status, the Kyrgyz language became a compulsory subject at non-Kyrgyz medium schools. Teachers complained about lack of specific pedagogy and articles related to the teaching and learning of the Kyrgyz language in non-Kyrgyz medium of instruction schools. Despite the said, some organizations continued to post some of its periodicals, but schools considered these as ‘gifts’ and expressed the need to have a country-wide thoroughly-systematized process of subscription to professional literature in the future.

Professional literature produced outside Kyrgyzstan was largely inaccessible. Teachers felt that in Kyrgyzstan, the situation of publication of professional literature was at critical stake.

Teachers need to actively subscribe to professional publications and journals. It is at least encouraging that the “Mektep” professional journal has started to be produced in Kyrgyzstan. We could look at the Russian publications and come up with similar or contextually relevant outlines for the publications. And if there is any foundation to support the people who can come together for this purpose, it will be so good for teachers to receive the information. I feel that schools should take this idea seriously. They can collect samples of good lessons. It is very important to note that it would encourage sharing of experiences which unfortunately is not happening to greater extent. (Vice principal, School I)

Initiatives were suggested for the encouragement of publications on professional innovations and ideas. In addition, involving the private sector into publication was important to consider. Not depending on printed materials only, many felt that with a growing community of internet users, teachers could develop professionally by accessing materials from World Wide Web. However, English

dominated sources, with little available in Russian, teachers could not utilize this chance to any great extent.

## **Lack of Supporting Structures for Teacher Professional Development**

School structures such as provision of time for development, reasonable teacher salary, and support in providing programs for development and creating teacher networks, were not well-thought through in the in-service teacher education system in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. Lack of recognition of their hard work affected teachers' low motivation to develop professionally. In this, one of the sources for motivation, namely the teachers' salary played an influencing role.

First of all, teachers need to be motivated through a raise in salary that acts as an incentive to develop professionally. When you don't have bread to feed your children at home for the salary you get at school, how will you think of developing professionally?  
(Primary class teacher, School G)

Government school teachers did not have time for their professional development because of a heavy teaching workload to earn more so that they could substantiate their income:

We also want to teach fewer classes and to develop ourselves. But I have to feed my children and help to support the family.  
Because of this, we teach more classes because in that way we can earn more. (Russian language teacher, School K)

Moreover, the system of differentiation of teachers' salary is according to not only experience, but to original and creative ways of teaching and learning.

In Kyrgyzstan, with the exception of English language teachers' association, there were no teacher associations.

I would like that a teacher center should be organized so that teachers could share their experiences and discuss issues of teaching and learning with each other. The center would make these more systematically as we as individual teachers find difficulty to go to each other and discuss those. (Math teacher, School I).

Thus, the need was identified by the teachers to form teacher associations to bring subject teachers together and to enable them to learn from each other. In order to establish a teacher network, they extended their willingness to be proactive in solving the issue of association formation.

For teacher professional development, we have only one institution as a 'monster' in the oblast. The teachers need to solve this problem themselves, I think. It can be an NGO type of organization or association. I communicate with university faculty; they have good knowledge, information and innovative teaching strategies to share. I think they should come together with school teachers to form an association so that to have the forum to share their experiences and knowledge. Another option is through Internet have online discussion forums... (Vice principal, School I)

Thus, vulnerable to speedy changes in their personal and professional lives, teacher networks could have helped teachers to work together for improvement and to voice their concerns collectively.

## **Discussion on Findings**

Market economy system, introduced since independence, has not been able to bring a positive effect on the professional lives of the teachers of Kyrgyzstan. Rather, it has resulted in uncertainties and multiple responsibilities, than the hope and support to teachers. Teachers identified the need for their professional development as an urgent issue to consider due to the change in goal of education, similar to what Mertaugh (2004) observed, "The content and delivery of education needed to be changed in order to make education responsive to the needs of the global economy." (p. 155)

Soviet in-service teacher education practices and policies were largely reflected in post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. However, the issues raised above required critical attention of education policy makers. For instance, improving the teacher performance through the so-called reforms mostly lacked empirical evidence. Mostly teacher professional development activities lacked teacher-needs consideration thus did not directly respond to teachers' classroom realities. Moreover, they also devalued teachers' expertise in the courses like Niyozov (2004) noted, "They [teachers in Tajikistan] are subjected to top-down approaches and outside-in training, where their knowledge and wisdom are largely ignored." (p. 57) In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, some grand projects happened to be implemented without much consideration and discussion. With this regard,

DeYoung (2004) shared the argument around the fact that ADB funded a one-million 'distance learning' center initiative. This helped in the realization that blind policies were better explained in terms of a few people's own interests and power, which dictated and became the deciding factor, but what wasn't how reality reflected the scenario. As one of the trainers of this 'fancy' initiative, during the program I observed an overlapping approach of this initiative to OTRI one-month course program. In my opinion, this initiative appeared more of a 'lip service' that excluded field-based aspects and lacked transparency in financial management. Research continues to highlight that teacher-needs based programs make more impact on teachers' professionalism in practical terms. OTRI's teacher-needs diagnostic through questionnaire happened to be an excellent idea but it should be further improved to make the training relevant to teachers. The courses funded by different groups should be carefully analyzed. A report of OSI (2002) highlighted this, stating,

With increased presence of donor assistance, and co-operating partners who have their own intentions and interests around the in-service training of teachers, it is important to coordinate activities. Any activities in the field of teacher training should be based on the demands and needs of strategic reform and the overall system. (p. 23)

In the reforms to come, the importance of the 50-year experience of OTRI in this area should be considered. Using the said, the strategies they used can be improved within the realities of present conditions, rather than ignoring and leaving them out from the reforms. Thus, the already set up structure of the *vyezdnyie* seminars of OTRI (Kibardina, 1997) should be further improved, and the reforms should target similar activities so as to make the learning of the teacher professionals more practical and needs-based. I found the January and August *dekada* to be cost-effective within the tight budget of education, and what was discussed could be a creditable approach. But the very nature of the delivery and content should be extensively discussed further.

In the current situation, teacher trainers' own development seemed to be taken for granted. Some reports (EFA, 1999; OSI, 2002) pointed out the aging staff of teacher retraining institutes. Kabylov (2003) also noted this and suggested,

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• Vyezdnoi is translated as site-based seminars. These are seminars where OTRI's teacher trainers go to the schools and conduct the seminars on the needs of the schools and teachers.



“There is a considerable need for continuing training for the teacher educators themselves” (p.5) so that to offer quality trainings.

In post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan, off-site in-service teacher education courses continued to remain as panacea for low quality school education and school improvement. All the training emphasized teacher technical skills development, and did not move towards the development of their reflective teaching ability. Moreover, the possibility of teacher practice-centered approaches for teacher development did not usually get policy makers’ considerable attention. The policies and reforms towards school improvement and teacher education largely ignored existing self-initiated and school-based teacher development activities. To emphasize, all these activities and their structures required considerable and reformative attention in the light of the current realities and priorities. Practical approaches of teacher professional development, such as action research, reflective practice and others, still remained unknown, and were hence not reflected in the current practice of in-service teacher education. In addition, school-based teacher development did not have structured monitoring and evaluation, except for the fact that they reported to the vice principal on academics who usually criticized the work. When, supporting structures were absent in the schools, such as the provision for time for professional development, and technical resources and availability of the in-house teacher educators, it was unlikely to expect much from the teachers.

Meagre teacher salary has resulted in low social status and low motivation of the teachers. In this regard, Mertaugh (2004) argued, “Teacher salaries in the Kyrgyz republic, which averaged 857 *soms* per month in 2001, are low in both absolute and relative terms. In absolute terms, they are only half of the minimum consumption level for individuals, not to mention households. As a result, teachers lack motivation and are compelled to work other jobs in order to support themselves and their families.” (p. 173) Similarly, Niyozov (2001) emphasized Marx and Maslow’s proposal, “when basic human needs are threatened, talk about intellect and education makes little sense.” (p. 363) Thus their basic needs forced teachers to opt to what Shamatov (2005) describes as, “Teachers also have to supplement their income by taking up extra work in order to fulfill their material needs, many teach in more than one school.” (p. 116)

Raise in teacher salary and providing fringe benefits, such as being released from paying electricity bills, were considered to motivate teachers to retain their jobs and have motivation for professional development. Comparing this with the health service which brought several reforms to raise the salary of health workers in Kyrgyzstan, Mertaugh (2004) suggested his views with relation to a raise in teacher salaries as “...some activities such as mentoring new teachers or

providing community education or remedial education could and should be recognized and compensated through supplementary income.” (173) Although I recognized that a raise in teachers’ salary could motivate teachers to develop professionally, I realized that it would not affect the quality of teaching and teacher professional development to a great extent, especially if supportive systems for professional development are not considered as well as systematically implemented and monitored. Thus the improvement of existing supportive systems and establishment of monitoring and evaluation should equally be considered in the reforms.

At present, school teachers of Kyrgyzstan cannot access professional literature as sources for their professional development. The EFA Report (2000) also claimed that “There is unavailability of information related to modern teaching methods. Before 1991, every teacher could subscribe to a number of professional literature, magazines and manuals. Today though, low salaries make it impossible for them to do so, as the professional newspapers and magazines are costly, and few, particularly Kyrgyz publications.” Subscription to government newspapers was mandatory practice in Soviet Kyrgyzstan schools; however, within present circumstances, this seemed as a burden and not a solution. Many teachers resented this practice, as their salary was not enough to feed the families let alone buy and read the newspapers. On this issue, some teachers voiced their concerns by writing open letter to the president and minister of education at that time, which included stopping them from forcefully subscribing to newspapers.

Presently, teachers of post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan seem to be caught in a dilemma. On one hand, their struggle for personal survival becomes a priority since the independence; but on the other hand, as professionals, their mission to educate better generation for the society continues to face hard conditions. Many government teachers voiced that they felt isolated and abandoned by the state. I found teachers who expressed the need for external help, but there were some who considered this situation as endless. They recognized their proactive role in solving their professional issues on their own. To provide an example, these teachers proposed ways such as using teacher developed and tested materials to support them in ‘methodological vacuum’ (Bekbolotov, 2000). Furthermore, suggested teacher networks happened to have great potential in preparing and facilitating the teachers in building a more just, fair and equitable society from the transition period.

## In Conclusion

Foremost demand for continuous professional development to raise the quality of education came from the emphasis on the democratic way of life spreading in the post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan. This was reflected in the schools and it confronted previously authoritarian teaching. In the decisions regarding what reform to adopt and how, serving teachers' voices and similarly teachers' own expertise and attempts for innovations were largely ignored, thus bringing lip service approaches and not the reforms in the in-service teacher education. Thereby, for future teachers' self-initiated and school-based professional development, there is required to be a better consideration and recognition by the education policy makers and there must be found ways to improve them further. Thus this could enable diversification within in-service teacher education. Related to discussion, immediacy of translation and dissemination of local knowledge about pedagogy and content was acutely felt by the teachers in order to come out of their professional information vacuum. Ironically, with their meager salary and lower social status, I found teachers still motivated for further development due to their optimistic views for that future and for the betterment of their country.

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